



Testimony by  
Senior Vice Chancellor Louise H. Feroe  
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Before the Committee on Education  
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Good morning Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Louise Feroe, and I am Senior Vice Chancellor for the Connecticut State University System. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today regarding House Bill 6432, *An Act Concerning Closing the Academic Achievement Gap*.

The Connecticut State University System wholeheartedly concurs with the intent of this legislation, and with the imperative to close the academic achievement gap in our state. There can be no greater priority if we are to permit our young people and our state to thrive for years to come.

By way of illustrating our support for such a statewide effort, I would like to briefly highlight some of the ways we are already contributing to achieving this goal, as well as underscore our commitment to collaborations and partnerships aimed at doing even more.

Because a college education builds on the knowledge and skills acquired in earlier years, it is best to begin thinking ahead to a high school curriculum during middle school. By taking rigorous courses early, students are better prepared for future academic success. This need is even more critical among students of color and low income students, who are often at a greater disadvantage.

You are well aware of what the data shows at the K-12 level, as reflected in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math scores, and how the achievement gap is more pronounced in our urban areas. And you also understand, as we do, the ramifications at the college level. Our universities have an achievement gap that begins even before students walk in the door, and we are working to end that trend. But we cannot do so alone. Our success is clearly dependant on success at the K-12 level – which is why we are doing more together, and would welcome the opportunity to do even more.

We are one of nearly two dozen university systems to sign on to Access 2 Success, a national initiative to reduce the achievement gap at the college level. Each of our universities is developing specific strategies to respond to this challenge, but again, what comes before is at least as important as what comes later, as this bill clearly recognizes.

Central, Eastern, Southern and Western have a range of programs to provide middle and high school students with a glimpse of college life, and work closely with teachers in school districts statewide. Perhaps the best known of these efforts is the Bridges program, which began at Western in collaboration with the Danbury and Bethel schools, and is now being extended to the other three CSUS universities and additional school districts.

After the first year of collaboration and revisions to senior-level classes, students' placements dramatically improved. Whereas 61 percent of juniors had previously placed into remedial English classes, only 37 percent of seniors entering Western from the two high schools did. By the third year, that number dropped to 15.5 percent. Additionally, while 62 percent of juniors had placed into remedial mathematics, Bridges reduced the level to 40 percent.

Reducing the number of remedial classes necessary for incoming freshmen saves students time and money, and makes higher education more accessible. Working closely with the high schools has also produced a continuing benefit for the students in higher education – increases of between 8 and 13 percent in first- and second-year retention.

Simply put, high school students are more likely to continue on to higher education, less likely to need remedial classes when they get there, and more likely to stay in school after their freshmen year.

Another important benefit has been the establishment of a collaborative working relationship between the university and high school faculties, and the impact it has had on both curriculum and student achievement. As the Bridges program has grown, Western has added science to the Bridges curriculum, and expanded its reach into the middle school grades. For example, an annual Exploration Academy has brought hundreds of middle school students to the university campus, for a first-hand glimpse into the opportunities a science education can offer.

Central is establishing working relationships with the New Britain and Bristol school districts and Eastern is working with the Windham and Norwich school districts. Southern is currently developing plans with the Meriden, Hamden and New Haven school districts; their program is called "Galileo."

Let me also take note of other initiatives we have to reach out to communities, their educators, and their students to help bring college within reach for students whom might not otherwise pursue this path.

These range from the Summer Transition and Dual Enrollment Initiatives at Eastern to the Partners in Science and ConnCAP program at Central. In addition, as universities with dynamic and resourceful teacher education programs, we have a demonstrated commitment to working with local schools to enhance educational opportunity, and assist their efforts to reduce the achievement gap. And while we are making progress, there can be no question that much more needs to be done if we are to truly "end the achievement gap."

To discuss, some of the programs underway and being developed at Southern, I am pleased to turn to the interim President of that institution, Dr. Stanley Battle.